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ABSTRACT

Since 1999, Access to Intercultural Bilingual Education (AIBE) has endeavored to improve the quality of education in the rural department of El Quiche, Guatemala, where most people speak a Mayan language as their first language. AIBE focuses on education at the preschool and primary levels, with emphases on parent participation, bilingual methods, and Mayan cultural content. This paper describes seven educational strategies that have proven effective in the project. It has become evident, through project experience, that the best results are achieved when these strategies are used together to modify the educational environment in the classroom. The strategies are: (1) educating children within the framework of Mayan culture, worldview, and history, including nonformal activities with family and community; (2) involving parents in their children's education in the classroom, at home, as participants in school management, and via political advocacy; (3) using the child's first language, explicit teaching of that language, and related teacher training; (4) teacher training in participatory education techniques, which facilitate development of critical consciousness; (5) producing and using culturally and socially appropriate materials; (6) systematically teaching Spanish as a second language; and (7) teaching and using Mayan mathematics. (SV)

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Kemow Eta' manik ("Weaving our Learning"): A Methodological Proposal to Increase Quality of Education in Rural Areas of El Quiche, Guatemala.

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Introduction:

"Kemow Eta' manik " is a kiche' phrase meaning "weaving our learning" that represents a set of seven strategies to support quality education for children whose first language is kiche'. These strategies have been developed within the frame of the Access to Intercultural Bilingual Education Project (AIBE) to be implemented with children from pre-school through third grade. This project is being carried out by World Learning in the Department of El Quiche, Guatemala, with funds from U.S. Agency for International Development. It started in April of 1999 and will end in November of 2004.

The project responds to the need for improving the quality of education in El Quiche, where most people speak either kiche' or ixhil as their first language. The majority of children begin school without being able to speak or understand Spanish- the country's official language and the language used in schools. The Project is using several strategies to facilitate the learning process: teacher training to better prepare them for work in a bilingual environment, educational materials elaborated within the kiche' or ixhil cultural context, parent participation in their children's education and in school management with emphasis on the participation of women, an appropriate methodology for pre-school children, strategies to familiarize the general population with the importance of intercultural bilingual education, and strengthening educational institutions for their own development.

Parents' participation and concern for their children's education is considered to be one of the most important accomplishment of the project. Other important accomplishments are changes in teacher practices, increased women's participation, creation of volunteer classroom assistants, and strengthened pre-school education.

The project has worked with over 600 parent committees to fortify their decision-making regarding education. It has also worked with approximately 4000 leaders and with 21,000 parents to increase their awareness in IBE. Parents' participation can be observed by their concern to increase retention and promotion, their understanding of the pedagogical need for IBE, the monitoring of

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teachers' performance and number of hours they actually teach, their awareness of parent's rights and responsibilities as well as the teachers' rights and responsibilities, and the organization of municipal and departmental parents' associations.

The project has trained over 1,200 primary and pre-school teachers, principals and Ministry of Education technical assistants through long courses (diplomados) equivalent to one semester of college education in IBE practices. Also, the project has trained approximately 8,250 teachers through short courses in topics related to IBE and education quality.

More than 850 women have been trained about school management and support of their children's education at home. Almost 600 women are participating in literacy training programs. These training activities have helped increase their participation in school organizations, as well as improve the support they provide their children regarding school work.

The Project has arranged the volunteer participation of students of 17 rural junior high schools to assist teachers of pre-school to third grade classes in rural schools. This has been particularly helpful in the cases of monolingual teachers with Mayan speaking children.

The project trains pre-school teachers and educator mothers in a methodology and materials that support "Cuentos Mayas" or Traditional Mayan Stories. A scale used to measure the development of the indigenous child in the Quiche rural area was developed and validated.

Intercultural Bilingual Education has been promoted through social communication media. AIBE has produced radio programs and four issues of the bilingual magazine "Ri Qatzxij ", informing about IBE experiences and techniques.

The bilingual teacher training school in El Quiche's departmental center, Santa Cruz, with its pre-school and primary levels, has been supported by the Project through training to its teachers and students. There are plans to provide training and technical assistance to four additional bilingual teacher training schools in the department. AIBE has also given training to teachers of teacher training schools at the national level.
Over the past four years, the project has implemented various strategies to improve education in the region. From its experience the project consolidated the most effective strategies for the Kemow Eta'manik.) The set of seven strategies proposed by Kemow Eta'manik are the following:

- Mayan culture, worldview, and history.
- Parents' participation in the education of their children.
- Use and application of the child's first language.
- Participatory education methodology.

- Production and use of appropriate educational materials.
- Systematic learning of Spanish as a second language.
- Learning and use of Mayan mathematics.

It has become evident, through project experience, that in order to achieve the best possible results, these strategies should be implemented together, rather than individually. They are to be used in the classroom, modifying the educational environment of the children. The strategies are simple in their application by both bilingual and monolingual Spanish teachers and the student's parents

The proposal has been built based on the project's field experience. Each of the strategies has been used and validated in the classroom, as well as the educational community.

This paper will present each strategy, giving a description and providing some ideas or suggestions on its use.

Mayan Culture, Worldview and History:

Children have the right to be educated within the framework of their own culture and about their own culture. Not only is this a right, but a basic characteristic for more effective education.

Children should know and value their culture, worldview and history. This knowledge and experience should begin with their own families and communities. Children will learn better when they perceive their learning environment as non-threatening and as a natural extension of the environment from which they come. When the learning situation has these characteristics, it reinforces children's self esteem and makes learning easier. On the contrary, if children perceive the educational environment (schools, teachers, principals) as hostile toward their culture, they will be more resistant to learning.

Some of the important areas to considered when teaching Mayan culture, worldview and history are: family and people closest to the children community; local organizations; authorities; traditions; food; local history; Mayan groups Mayan cosmology; Mayan science; ancient and recent history; and the current social, economic, and political situation of Mayan people in the country.

Non-formal, outside of school, educational situations are very appropriate to treat these kinds of topics. These activities include: involvement of parents and senior members of the community, visits, demonstrations, and activities like cooking, dances, etc. In addition, a number of participatory activities can be used in the classroom for children to present the knowledge and experience they have of their own culture.

Parents' Participation in the Education of their Children:

An important factor to increase quality of education is the participation of parents in their children's education. This participation should happen on several levels: in the classroom, with school management, at home, and through support on a political level.

Participation of mothers and fathers in the classroom could be through assisting teachers as interpreters when the teachers do not speak the language of the children, or by assisting children so they have a more individualized attention. This assistance would particularly help in large or multi grade classes. Parents could also serve as resources in the classroom, sharing their own knowledge and skills with the children. In this respect, World Learning has developed a methodology called Popular Participation in Curriculum and Instruction (POPCI) for participation of parents and community members in the educational environment. This methodology has been implemented in a current World Learning education project in Ethiopia and has been piloted in Guatemala.

Mothers and fathers should assist school management and operations through the parents' organization or as individuals. Parents should be familiar with the problems that exist in the school and help the principal and teachers in school management. It is also very important that they monitor the teachers' performance, as well as the progress of their children. Parents should visit the school at least every two months and talk with the teachers about the behavior and progress of their sons and daughters. It is also important that parents help with the school's chores and maintenance.

Mothers and fathers should support the studies of their children at home, helping them with homework and giving them time and space to do their school work. This holds true, even when parents are illiterate. An older sibling or relative who is able to read and write can help, or the illiterate parents can be trained to assist their children even without knowing the content of the homework. For instance, parents may monitor that children do their homework and, when they have to do practice to prepare for writing, check how close to the model is their work.

Organized parents can have political incidence at the municipal, departmental, or even national levels. They can petition for better quality education, more teachers, teachers with the ability to understand and speak the native language of their children, and a higher educational budget. This is only an example of areas where parents can have incidence, but there is a wide range of possible themes that should be considered to increase educational quality.

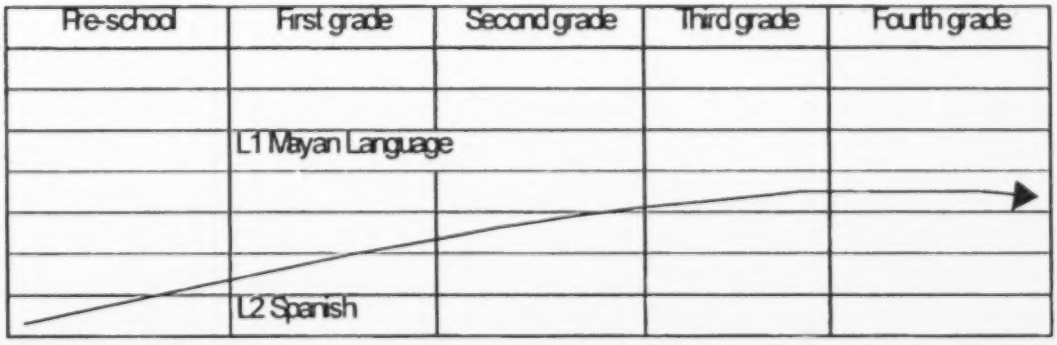
Parents should be aware of the importance and value of their participation in their children's education. They should also be aware of their rights and responsibilities as parents of school children. To help increase parents' process of awareness building, training activities just for them or including the teachers are very important. It is also important to support local and departmental

parents' organizations through meetings and activities that facilitate processes of diagnosis of the local educational situation and planning to overcome the problems found.

Use and Application of the Child's First Language

Obviously learning should be in the language understood and spoken by the children and their teachers. Without a common language, there is no learning. In El Quiche, approximately 50% of the children whose only language is a Mayan language, have teachers who only speak and understand Spanish. This results in a total lack of communication. Without communication, there is no education. This is one of the main causes of the high rate of failure and drop-outs in the first grades of primary education among indigenous children in Guatemala.

Ideally, in pre-school, the children's mother tongue should be used almost exclusively. Introduction of a second language should be gradual, reaching a point where the children have a similar command of both languages. The following graphic illustrates the ideal combination of the first and second languages in the first five years of school.



A child's native language should not only be used in the learning situation as the main language for communication but it should also be taught systematically in order for the children to develop the four basic linguistic competencies: speaking, understanding, reading and writing.

When teachers are bilingual and speak the language of the children but do not have a good command of the language's reading and writing, there is a need for teacher training in this aspect. It is very important that teachers have a good command of the children's L1 (first language) so that the children develop a similar command. The goal is that children whose first language is not the country' s official language get to develop a command of L1 and L2 (official language of the country) that is equal to children whose L1 is the official language of the country.

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When teachers do not speak the children' s L1 they need to be aware that it is a problem. These teachers need training in techniques that help them communicate with the students, while still teaching them. They may ask for assistance from parents or students who are bilingual, use graphic materials and learn the language.

AIBE has developed a strategy to facilitate the communication of monolingual teachers with their students by having junior high school students as interpreters in those classrooms. These students have received training from the project to provide this assistance. This service is recognized as schoolwork in their own studies.

Participatory Education Methodology

Education should foster the development of critical consciousness. A well developed person is able to know their environment, identify problems, detect causes, and plan and implement realistic solutions. A person with critical consciousness has a realistic conception of their world and is able to make the changes needed in this world to better position themselves, or at least to move in that direction. These changes are made with the awareness of being part of a group, thus respecting the others. Education should not be a "brick maker machine", producing carbon-copy people who follow what they have been told. School teaching methods that use rote learning and teacher's authority are the tools for this meager education.

Participatory education facilitates the development of critical consciousness. This is not just through a set of techniques, but implies an entirely different concept of education. Education is conceived as more than transferring knowledge and skills, but as a way of exposing and bringing together the participants' experiences and skills. Education is also the process of practicing to develop new skills and to apply them to real situations. Participatory techniques help to implement this unique concept of education.

When teachers are trained in participatory techniques, they should be aware that the techniques are just tools to implement this kind of education. Rather, it is a dialectic process in which the simple use of participatory techniques does not ensure the implementation of an education that develops critical consciousness. On the other hand without the use of participatory techniques, it is very difficult to foster the development of critical consciousness through education.

Production and Use of Appropriate Educational Materials

The following are some important characteristics of educational materials that support quality education among indigenous children of El Quiche: they represent the context of the students, are interactive, and cheap to produce.

Materials should represent the cultural and social context of the children who use them. The content and form of the materials should be meaningful to the children. They should be at ease with them and this is only possible when the materials include the children's culture. Illustrations should show scenes taken from the student's daily life, representing real situations that are familiar to the them. Of course, materials should be written in a language that is well understood by the students.

The materials students use should be interactive. Children should be able to use, play with, talk about, construct and create projects with them. Materials should facilitate students active involvement in educational activities and help to develop critical consciousness.

The materials, should not be costly. Schools, teachers, and parents should be able to produce them, so there is no need for outside funding. It is possible to develop a variety of materials using resources found in the communities themselves. If the students are involved in the production, this process is also an educational experience.

Some examples of educational materials are: posters to facilitate oral communication, flashcards, cubes, bingo games, dominos, dice, and abacuses.

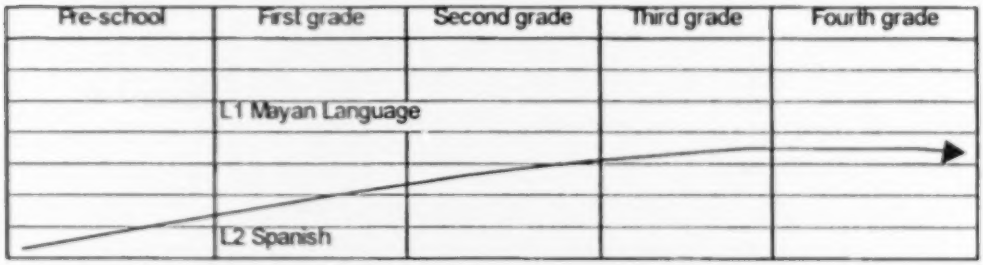
Training and user guides are key factors for the appropriate local production and use of educational materials. This training given to teachers, parents and other members of the educational community.

Systematic Learning of Spanish as a Second Language

Spanish is the official language of Guatemala. As it was said before, most of schools only teach in Spanish to children whose first language is not Spanish. Through this painful experience children who stay in school learn some Spanish, but it never reaches an acceptable level. Children learn Spanish because is used in school and on the street, but there is no systematic method of teaching Spanish as a second language. The result is that indigenous children learn a sub-par Spanish that is never at the same level as those whose first language is Spanish.

Ideally, as was presented under the strategy of teaching the L1, in fourth grade children whose first language is not Spanish should have a command of Spanish similar to the native Spanish speaking child. Ideally again, in a real bilingual education system, the use of both languages should level out from fourth grade on.

Techniques for teaching Spanish as a second language, appropriate texts and training of teachers in the use of these techniques and texts are crucial elements to implement this strategy in the classroom.



Learning and Use of Mayan Mathematics

Mayan people develop mathematics from elements of nature: the cosmos, plants, animals and the human being. For instance, the positional system of numbers is related to the growing of the plants from bottom upwards. The number vigesimal system is related to the human being: ten fingers and ten toes.

The concept of zero is the opposite of vacuum and nothingness. It is represented by the cacao seed and means full potential, like a seed.

As part of their culture, children should be familiar with and know the writing and logic of Mayan mathematics. Again appropriate materials and teacher training are needed to implement this strategy.

Conclusions

In a multilingual society there is the need for special educational strategies in order to implement bilingual intercultural education which requires superior educational quality and efficiency. Children need to be taught in two languages while maintaining a similar quality to any other school in the country.

This means that resources should be allocated to implement these strategies. Resources are needed for activities to raise awareness about the importance of IBE and educational quality; to train teachers, parents and other members of the educational community; to produce materials; and to follow up at the school and community levels.

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